

Obituaries

John E Mack

Psychiatrist who studied claims of alien abduction and won the Pulitzer prize for biography

John E Mack, a psychiatrist at Harvard, won the Pulitzer prize for his 1976 biography of T E Lawrence, *A Prince of Our Disorder*, and both fame and notoriety for his 1994 best-seller *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*.

He was concerned with social causes, especially nuclear threats and the human environment. His disparate personas—from esteemed professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School to social activist and believer in alien abductions—were as incongruent as the extraordinary assemblage of his supporters, who included venture capitalist Laurence Rockefeller and attorney Daniel Sheehan, best known for his defence of left-leaning causes.

Dr Mack was the founding director of the Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age and was active as a member of Physicians for Social Responsibility and of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. He made a “landmark” contribution to the study of children’s responses to nuclear war, said Dr Robert Jay Lifton, lecturer in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, who worked with Dr Mack for over 25 years in the antinuclear movement.

His interest in the stories of people who said they had been abducted by aliens—he called them his “experiencers”—began in 1990. He told an interviewer, “When I heard about this phenomenon in 1990, I was very doubtful. I thought it must be some kind of mental illness.” He later described the abduction claims as “an authentic mystery” that deserved to be researched. A third of US adults say they believe aliens have visited the Earth at some time in the past, according to a 2001 Gallup poll.

Dr Mack’s embrace of hypnotism to draw out stories of alien abduction drew fire from those who cautioned that “recovered memories” were unreliable. They warned that, for example, in the Satanic abuse cases

that were sweeping the nation, innocent people were being imprisoned because hypnosis and suggestive interview techniques often created fabricated memories.

Elizabeth Loftus, professor of psychology at the University of California, Irvine, and an expert in the malleability of memory, said that Dr Mack “underestimated his own role in creating the recollections and beliefs” of his patients. “His use of hypnosis gave the method undeserved credibility.”

Dr Mack shrugged off demands for physical evidence, saying such demands were merely part of a flawed “Western” construct of science that failed to appreciate “other dimensions”—dimensions that he said could not be measured or proved by ordinary means. By listening to patients carefully, Dr Mack claimed he could determine that their stories were true and not explainable by other phenomena such as mental illness, sleep paralysis, seizures, or dreams.

Dr Mack, who founded the department of psychiatry at Cambridge Hospital, Massachusetts, in the late 1960s and became

professor of psychiatry at Harvard in 1972, faced potential loss of tenure because of his unconventional methods. Harvard authorities launched an inquiry into his work in 1994. The review committee was headed by Arnold Relman, former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine* and professor of medicine at Harvard. He told the *BMJ*, “We quickly came to the conclusion that he had the right to investigate any issue he wanted, no matter how weird. After all, Galileo

sounded weird to many people of his day. But we did believe he should use rational and scholarly methods.”

Ultimately, the committee concluded that Dr Mack was not using “rational and scholarly” methods, but he was allowed to stay on, with recommendations to improve his methods.

Dr Mack’s indifference to scientific principle rankled Dr Relman, who said, “If we



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abandon scientific principles, then we can’t deal with the real problems we face.”

Dr Mack continued to dismiss concerns about his methods, saying that people should keep an “open mind.”

John E Mack was born in New York city in 1929. He graduated from Harvard in 1955 and trained at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center in Boston, before serving as a psychiatrist in Japan with the US air force. After setting up Cambridge Hospital’s psychiatry unit, he became its head of department from 1969 to 1977.

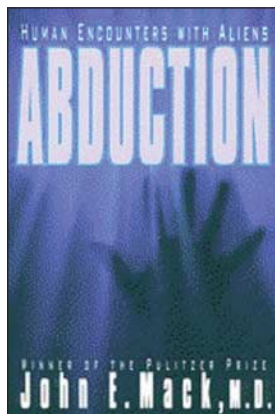
He was struck by a car and killed while in London to speak at a symposium of the T E Lawrence Society. His marriage to Sally Stahl was dissolved in 1995. He leaves three sons. (JEANNE LENZER)

John Edward Mack, former professor of psychiatry Harvard (b New York, United States, 1929; q Harvard 1955), d 27 September 2004.

Advice

We will be pleased to receive obituary notices of around 250 words. Pressure on space means that in most cases we will be able to publish only about 100 words in the printed journal, but we can run a fuller version on our website. We will take responsibility for shortening. We do not send proofs. Good quality, original photographs are welcome. Please give a contact telephone number and, where possible, supply the obituary on a disk or by email to obituaries@bmj.com

We need to know the year of birth and exact date of death of the deceased, and we prefer obituaries to state the cause of death. Please spell out abbreviations.



Mohammed Muhi Al Dean Al Moudaris



Consultant paediatrician Rugby and Coventry (b 1945; q Baghdad 1969; MRCP), died from pancreatic cancer on 14 April 2004.

Almo came to England with his family in 1981. Having worked at East Birmingham Hospital as community medical officer, he was appointed to St Cross Hospital, Rugby, in 1990. He oversaw the opening of a new children's department and the merging of children's inpatient services with Walsgrave Hospital, Coventry, and ushered in the concept of providing care for children at home (the hospital at home service) and an improved access to specialist clinics in Rugby. He leaves a wife, Nudhar, and two children. [ANDREW COE]

Christopher Kit-Seong Chew



Consultant ophthalmologist Wolverhampton and Midland Counties Eye Infirmary, Wolverhampton, West Midlands (b Malaysia 1951; q Melbourne, Australia, 1977; DRCOG, FRCS Glas, FRCOphth), died from pancreatic cancer on 26 July 2004.

Chris moved to the United Kingdom having gained a place on a GP exchange training scheme, and it was during this time that he discovered a talent for ophthalmology. He pursued his initial training in Leicester, Southampton, and Norwich. After a move to Oxford he developed a special interest in corneal disease. Chris took a special interest in setting up and developing the cataract eye service at Cannock. He coauthored a book, *Lecture Notes on Ophthalmology*. He leaves a wife, Alice, and two children. [S SANDRAMOULI]

Longer versions of these obituaries are available on bmj.com

William Wilkin Davey



Former surgeon England, Nigeria, and Australia (b Northern Ireland 1912; q Belfast 1935; FRCSI, FRCS), d 30 May 2004.

Will Davey wrote the first textbook on surgery in tropical countries, *Companion to Surgery in Africa*. After the second world war, during which he served in the Royal Air Force and was the first surgeon to land in Normandy on D Day, he became consultant surgeon at the Whittington Hospital, London. His teaching skills led to an invitation to go to Nigeria to become the first professor of surgery at the University College, Ibadan. Will moved to Australia in 1969 and set up as a surgeon in general practice. He leaves a wife, Gill; five children; and 10 grandchildren. [CATHERINE DAVEY]

John Ivor Wynne Davies

General practitioner Northampton 1953-78 (b Chester 1921; q Cambridge 1952; DObst RCOG), died from bronchopneumonia on 4 September 2004.

John left school in 1939 and joined the Manchester Regiment as a private soldier. He was later commissioned in the Royal Artillery and became a battery commander in north west Europe, where he was awarded the Croix de Guerre. At the age of 56 he retired from general practice but continued to work for the Benefits Agency until he was 74. Predeceased by his wife, Elizabeth, he leaves three sons and five grandchildren. [J B NUTTALL]

Mohamed Hassan El-Tayib



Head of the cardiology department Sudan Heart Centre, Khartoum, and previously consultant physician Khartoum Teaching Hospital and senior physician Ministry of Health, Sudan (b 1937; q Khartoum 1962; FRCP), died from complications of a perforated gastric ulcer on 22 July 2004.

After junior hospital posts in Khartoum he spent a year at University College Hospital, London. On his return to Sudan he gained extensive experience in Wau, Kassala, and Port Sudan. He then took up his consultant post at Khartoum Teaching Hospital with teaching responsibilities in the University of Khartoum medical school. To improve and develop medicine in the Sudan, he travelled widely in the Middle East, Europe, and the Indian subcontinent. He leaves a wife, Safia, and four daughters. [BRYAN STACK]

Jenny Lennox (née Ackroyd)



Consultant general and vascular surgeon Harlow (b 1950; q Cambridge/Middlesex Hospital, London, 1974; MA, MChir, FRCS), d 5 September 2004.

Jenny was the first female surgical registrar and senior registrar at St Thomas's Hospital. She was appointed as consultant surgeon in general and vascular surgery at Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow in 1987 and developed a particular interest in day surgery. There was no dedicated day unit there so she and a band of helpers raised the funds to build one. Her most recent interest had been the building of a new surgical wing at the hospital, due to be opened by the health secretary next month. It is to be called the Jenny Ackroyd Surgical Wing. She leaves a husband, Malcolm, and two children. [M S LENNOX]

Frank Bowen Wright

Former consultant radiologist Warrington and St Helens Hospitals (b 1920; q Liverpool 1943; MRad, FRCR, DMRD), d 28 June 2004.

Frank worked hard for the health service—he was one of the backbone. He kept up to date in technique and equipment by extensive travel to meetings and to manufacturers. He married Sheila (née Richardson), who had been in his year, and they joined the Royal Army Medical Corps together in 1944 and were both posted to India. On his return, Frank joined the second postwar radiology course in Liverpool, and Sheila trained in psychiatry. Predeceased by Sheila, he leaves three daughters. [J H E CARMICHAEL]